

Whose Turn is It? Research on Gaming in the iSchools

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Gaming is a rapidly growing new medium with sales surpassing box office and music revenues. Gaming provides a method of interacting with information in ways that static, non-participatory information containers cannot provide. Libraries are supporting gaming activities and educators are integrating gaming in new ways. Most of the younger generations (and many of the older generations) are drawn to gaming activities for leisure, sometimes by themselves, but more often, through sharing the same physical or virtual space with others. Gaming, once relegated to the back rooms and basements, is now discussed frequently on the news and at the dinner table.

This phenomenon has also caught the attention of iSchool researchers. Some scholars are exploring the information spaces in which gamers live and support their activities. Others explore ways in which gaming can be used to teach traditional skills, while some look at how gaming teaches new types of information literacy not easily teachable in a traditional lecture-style format. Some support the gaming creation process through working with industry or developing ways that youth programs facilitate game creation and shared experiences. As libraries support gaming activities, researchers are exploring this intersection to understand how gaming can be effectively used.

There is also a growing body of research on gaming relevant to iSchool areas such as information and telecommunications management. Academic conferences including AMCIS and HICSS have had mini-tracks on the subject for several years. There have been several calls for papers for journal special issues on related topics, particularly the growth of online multiplayer environments as a new medium of communication. Virtual worlds, which originated as large scale open ended games, have grown in popularity to the point where they are becoming increasingly mainstream. This trend will strengthen as technological advances make these environments increasingly compelling.

The increasing use of gaming technologies requires greater attention from academia. Examples of topics that can be studied include business models, the digital persona, HCI elements, mobile gaming, online addiction, the purpose and value of recreational gaming in libraries, and virtual item property rights. A number of universities have recognized gaming as an area of high industry and student demand. The iSchools are a natural home for this type of activity but we are currently behind traditional fields such as education, performing arts, engineering, and communication in building research, industry funding, and academic programs.

The goal of this roundtable is to attract iSchool researchers who are exploring gaming research projects. This will be a sharing roundtable, with the hope of allowing researchers to make connections between schools and across disciplines. Those looking to get involved in gaming research are also welcome to attend and discover potential partnerships. A goal will be to craft several potential multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional grant proposals in order to allow the iSchools to take their turn at the gaming table.